DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 862 EA 021 572

AUTHOR Kiernan, Henry
TITLE Team Building: Connecting Substance to Educational Leadership.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (San Antonio, TX, November 17-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Organization; Cooperation; *Cooperative Planning; Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; Interpersonal Competence; *Leadership; *Management Teams; Participative Decision Making; Power Structure; *Teamwork

ABSTRACT

Making substance the leading edge of educational leadership means building a team committed to developing strategies for achieving a vision of change; thus, the team becomes a motivating implementation network of individuals who choose to support the vision and follow it through to reality. For team building to succeed, interpersonal skills must matter. The danger exists, however, that too much emphasis will be placed on interpersonal relationships--particularly cooperation--at the expense of achieving substance. Because of increased interdependence, our vision of school leadership needs a much larger number of people who have both cognitive and interpersonal leadership skills. These skills involve the ability to perceive differences in goals and beliefs among people and the ability to implement change by motivating a network of diverse groups of individuals. But beyond increasing the substance of leadership, a degree of turbulence is necessary and expected in order to develop an effective team. Rarely are all individuals equally invested in team effort and equally prepared to plan strategies to achieve the vision; however, effective teams utilize levels of individual differences and commitment and develop an efficient unit that is both powerful and affiliative. (17 references) (KM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315862

TEAM BUILDING: CONNECTING SUBSTANCE TO EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Henry Kiernan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented by

Henry Kiernan
Southern Regional High School District
600 North Main Street
Manahawkin, NJ 08050

NCSIE Conference
San Antonio, Texas
November 17-21, 1989

EA021 578

TEAM BUILDING: CONNECTING SUBSTANCE TO EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Before quality circles, before shared decision-making, before school-based management, questions were generated to identify essential leadership behaviors and styles. How is leadership different from management? How is leadership exercised within frameworks that value independence? How can we extend our appreciation and knowledge of the subtleties inherent in our own leadership practices and those of our colleagues?

And while we have enhanced our research base and focused our questions, the debate continues surrounding the relationship between leadership and management, between connecting the identity of individuals with the integration of groups. Moving away from focusing on leadership style and its visible behaviors, we need to consider the substance of leadership, especially through the use of longitudinal studies. Indeed, it may take years to determine if an individual who successfully mobilized a group actually led them in a thoughtful and beneficial direction. It may also take years for the members of a group to understand and assess their own role in interacting with the team leader and other team members through the mobilizing or action process.

Making substance the leading edge of educational leadership means applying more than just visible behaviors. It means setting the agenda, an agenda to include strategies for achieving a vision for change. It especially means building a team committed to making the vision a reality; thus, the team becomes a motivating implementation network of individuals who choose to support the vision and follow it through to reality.

While the substance of leadership deals with content and direction, in a team environment it also stimulates controversy. Abraham Zaleznik considers the substance of leadership to be the genuine route to independence, "... leading with substance requires maturity not only to tolerate others' aggressiveness but also to direct it to substance issues" (Zaleznik 63). Yet it is difficult to deal with the substance of educational leadership because events generated since Sputnik and including recent reforms have left school leaders in the position of reacting to change rather than acting or presenting a vision for change. The cost of reaction is the loss of creativity, the loss of setting the agenda by the very people who lead our schools.

However, most of the confusion in understanding the substance of educational leadership is triggered by the myth and

reality of each school leader's role and responsibilities. To explain the myth and reality of a supervisor's role, John Kotter defined variables such as the leader's conception of the role, the focus of attention and the key behaviors required to lead subordinates. These variables also serve to impact the balance between the substance and style of educational leadership. As seen in Table 1, the myths of school leadership ignore informal authority, large and diverse needs of staff, and the impact of a wide range of political, symbolic, participatory and bureaucratic approaches applied to fit the situation. In addition, the reality of school leadership demands knowledge and direct application of skills requiring the school administrator to manage all lateral relationships as well as any and all interactions with the immediate supervisor. Any team relationship necessitates a sense of dependence of the part of team members.

Given the confusing pull between the myth and reality of educational leadership, the team building process becomes paramount to clarify roles and to bring personalities into sync with the goals of the organization. It is especially necessary when considering other important behaviors of devising a leadership environment where members of the team feel energized to deliver a multiplicity of points of view in order to deal with

a problem. This feeling of trust built upon an agreement to disagree is similar to Rosabeth Kanter's assertion: "It is not the 'caution of committees' that is sought--reducing risk by spreading responsibility--but the better idea that comes from a clash and an integration of perspectives" (Kanter 167).

Table 1

	MYTH	REALITY
Conception of the Role	Formal Authority is based on the position.	Informal Authority is just as strong in determining position.
Focus of Attention	Small number of staff reports directly to the school leader.	Large number of staff report regarding all tasks.
Behaviors Needed to Lead Staff	Basic management process: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, etc.	A wide range of political, symbolic, participatory, and bureaucratic approaches applied to fit the situation.
Other Important Behaviors	None necessary.	The school leader must manage all lateral and supervisor relationships.

The emphasis on team building is driven by a sense of connection and is strengthened by sharing, by being oneself. Rather than focusing on a sense of constraint with an emphasis on

being alike, the individual and the group share control through purposeful self-direction, independence and self-confidence.

When analyzing the everyday occurrences prevalent in leading a school, it is logical to describe most positions of educational leadership as collections of groups in interactions with one another. They formally and informally cooperate and compete with one another; they form coalitions and bargain with each other. It is also possible to view the decisions made by school leaders as the consequence of the interaction of forces among groups of individuals within the organization of the school.

Unfortunately, given the powerful forces of groups within schools, most educational leaders are apprehensive and unknowledgeable about working collaboratively with teams of individuals. In fact, school leaders concentrate their efforts on managing teachers and colleagues rather than building effective teams, perhaps because their own lateral and supervisor relationships are also focused on a one-on-one manager-subordinate emphasis.

In addition, in our culture the individual possesses far more standing than the group. Much of the initial pronouncements from the effective schools research stressed the importance of the leadership style of the building principal. While it is

sensible and possible that a strong principal may positively impact a school's learning environment, the danger lies in the presumption of accomplishment solely by an individual which ultimately implies the presumption of inaction by committee or group. Kenneth Galbraith reminds us, "Because individuals have more standing in the culture than organizations, they regularly get credit for achievement that belongs, in fact, to the organization."

To assert the preeminence of groups over the individual is as challenging a prospect for schools as it is for other organizations. Yet, it is a necessary assertion. The clash between the myth and reality of educational leadership is similarly perceived in the myth and reality surrounding team building. Indeed, we have no mythology for team building because of the delicate balance between functioning well interdependently in groups and functioning well independently on our own. We can either be dependent and equal with others in the group or independent and alone.

Kanter reflects on the mythology surrounding the idea of "team" holding that differences among members do not exist because they are now a "team" and therefore it is not legitimate to acknowledge or talk about them. Everyone acts as if they were all sharing equally in the operations of the group. While inside

the team, they have to pretend that they do not see that some are more able than others, or that the team leader is railroading another decision through or that the highest-level people are dominating. Where team mythology is strong, only an outsider ... can open it for examination...(This is an) example of "pluralistic ignorance": everyone knows individually but assumes that no one else does. And as long as no one says it aloud, it might not even be true (Kanter 262-263).

For team building to succeed, interpersonal skills must matter. We need to accept that most achievements depend on individual effort, risk-taking and perserverance. However, significant events occur because of one individual's ability to relate to one (or many) other(s) with understanding, acceptance and sensitivity. John Kotter defines organizational excellence as being impossible without individual excellence. He views social skills as the mechanism to augment the technical competencies of leadership. "(Individual excellence) demands a sophisticated type of social skill: a leadership skill that can mobilize people and accomplish important objectives despite dozens of obstacles; a skill that can pull people together for meaningful purposes despite the thousands of forces that push us apart; a skill that can keep our important corporations and public institutions from descending into a mediocrity

characterized by bureaucratic infighting, parochial politics, and vicious power struggles" (Kotter 38).

However, the danger exists that too much emphasis will be placed on interpersonal relations, particularly cooperation, at the expense of achieving substance. If conflict is not induced by the team leader, group norms will foster what Zaleznik calls "the appearances of getting along" rather than encouraging individuality. Attention is misdirected by being placed on social relations and organization politics rather than the substance of achieving goals.

Because of increased interdependence, our vision of school leadership needs a much larger number of people who have leadership skills, both cognitive and interpersonal skills. These skills involve the ability to perceive differences in goals and beliefs among people and the ability to implement change by motivating a network of diverse groups of individuals. The more we can develop a support system of people who understand what our vision entails, the more we will be prepared for what actually occurs.

Warren Bennis succinctly supports the team building process when he states, "Let me emphasize once more how strongly I believe that any manager's first and foremost priority is to

create around him some kind of executive team, what I have termed a "constellation," to help direct and run the office of the leader. They needn't -- indeed, they mustn't-- be "little leaders" or carbon copies of one another, but they must be compatible, able to work as a team, knowledgeable and competent within their areas of specialization, and very serious about the idea of a(n) ..."executive constellation" and its importance" (Bennis 161).

But beyond increasing the substance of leadership, a degree of turbulence is necessary and expected in order to develop an effective team or "executive constellation." Rarely are all individuals equally invested in team effort and equally prepared to plan strategies to achieve the vision. Furthermore, in schools as well as other social organizations, territoriality or "issues of turf" undermine initiatives which directly or indirectly threaten the power of departments and/or individuals. Effective teams, however, utilize levels of individual differences and commitment and develop an effective unit that is both powerful and affiliative.

Conflict can strengthen the team building process. When it is openly recognized at the beginning, conflict can serve to test the merit of ideas against direct challenges from others; it can stimulate other points of view as long as individual team members

do not assert their own views at the expense of not recognizing others. It is the team leader's responsibility to steer the resolution of any conflict in a direct and responsive way.

Barbara Kovach recognizes that power provides the impetus for forward motion while affiliation provides the social "glue" that builds the group connection. "Each member need not be equally direct and responsive, but the directness of one fares best if balanced by the responsiveness of another. Further, the leaders who emerge among group members are likely to be both direct and responsive "(Kovach 189). It is in the purpose of these individuals to guide a group through conflict and help them reach the best solutions. Searching for common ground in education often appears elusive. But we need to look for it. In effective teams, diversity establishes common ground through shared goals and expectations. In other words, by identifying mutual benefits a team leader diffuses opposition and/or submerged conflict in a direct and responsive way.

Dealing with proclivities as well as aversions, dealing with similarities as well as differences we can begin to weigh the balance between directness and responsiveness, between myth and reality. The team building process, when applicable, is the catalyst for change and effectiveness when it integrates

different points of view and explores a wide range of alternative possibilities. As a mechanism to develop solutions, teams collectively accomplish more than any one could accomplish alone.

School leaders would do well to design team building processes to enhance the sense of vision, to help align strategies to achieve common goals and to provide the impetus for setting the agenda for change. In a turbulent, changing world the team building process can provide school leaders with the courage to act rather than relying on the illusory comfort of reaction, on past policies and procedures, on paralysis by analysis. Knowing when to move a school and community from paralyzing discord and toward a vision of the common good, school leaders can strike the balance between leadership's substance and style, between its myth and reality.

Works Cited

Bennis, Warren. The Unconscious Conspiracy. New York. Amacon, 1976.

Galbraith, Kenneth. The New Industrial State. New York. Free Press, 1977.

Kanter, Rosabeth. Changemasters. New York. Simon & Schuster, 1983.

Kotter, John. The Use of Power and Influence. New York. Free Press, 1985.

Kotter, John. The Leadership Factor. New York. Free Press, 1988.

Kovach, Barbara. Organizational Sync. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. Prentice Hall, Inc., 1983.

Zaleznik, Abraham. "Real Work". Harvard Business Review, January-February, 1989: 57-64.